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Sweaty Feet

John 20:19-31

Thomas Michael Smith
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I have learned a fascinating factoid. The average foot perspires a quarter cup of liquid on a slow day, and up to one full cup is excreted on a day of fancy footwork. This is why companies are spending so much money and time to develop a shoe that breathes. While you may not break into a sweat if you walk a mile, your feet surely will. The environment in our shoes closely resembles a Louisiana swamp - about 94 degrees in temperature with 96 percent humidity.

I had considered illustrating this by asking everyone to take off a shoe and passing it to a neighbor, but I decided this might pose a health risk! So, it would seem we want to maintain our frantic lifestyles because we want to keep up with a frantic world, but we don't want to feel it, at least in terms of sweaty feet.

All of which may be germane on this second Sunday of Easter because there was a lot of running around in those early post-resurrection days. A whole lot of sweating going on. Mary Magdalene runs hysterically to the disciples upon discovering that the stone had been rolled away from Jesus' tomb. Peter and the other disciple dutifully ran to see for themselves, with the 'disciple whom Jesus loved' beating Peter to the gravesite. Mary remains weeping in the garden, breathing with difficulty. She left after realizing that Jesus was still alive and still calling her by name. Meanwhile, the men returned home, later meeting behind locked doors that evening, 'sweating' it out again for fear of the Jews. What would become of them? What did Mary mean by 'I have seen the Lord'?

The rest of the disciples eventually see Jesus too. And what he says to them - repeatedly in this passage from the Gospel of John - may not in fact make them as comfortable as the words may seem to us, far removed from the realities of their day. Jesus says, 'peace be with you,' as he stands in front of them, showing them his pierced hands and bloody torso. He invites them to touch, reaffirming the notion that he rose physically from the dead. Touch me. Put your hand right there. Connect.

A week later, Jesus replays the scene for doubting Thomas. Put your hand in my side. It doesn't say Thomas took him up on the offer. Maybe Thomas thought it was a bit gross to put a finger into the hole in Jesus' body. I would.

Yet here is the lesson for us, that faith can be a gross, sweaty affair. Following Jesus may involve blood, sweat and tears. When we walk with our faith in Jesus, we may not experience nice, airy breathing. Sure, Jesus speaks words of comfort to us - 'peace be with you' - but do these words prevent the walk of faith from being difficult? If you would follow Jesus, you need to count on many strenuous miles - sometimes uphill, and frequently uncomfortable.

Look, the first disciples eventually got a glimpse of the race Jesus was running, and the unanimously dropped out of the event. What did they expect? It's hard to say. Maybe they thought they would have easy laurels and the wind at their backs. Instead,

when the going got tough, these pillars of faith crowded into a room and bolted the door and sweated out the coming of the Jews to round them up and put an end to the Jesus movement of which they were the remaining part.

Yet, after a humiliating, messy, excruciating death, Jesus was back - and saying, 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe' and 'Peace be with you.' And few of them were exactly ready for this. I mean, they were overjoyed that Jesus was alive. But none of it worked out like they thought it would. Despite what Jesus had said to them, none of them saw either the crucifixion nor the resurrection coming. Could they now see the difficult road ahead? I doubt it. But with Jesus present among them, gross wounds in hands and feet and side, it was indeed a whole new ballgame.

These are words of challenge to us. Jesus uses 'Peace be with you' as introductory words to a great commissioning sentence: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." For the first time, Jesus has offered his disciples the gift of his 'peace.' This peace serves as a portal to a new shalom-age - the Age of the Holy Spirit. The phrase "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" is a creative word. Just as in Genesis God spoke before creating the world, so Jesus declares the existence of this new shalom-saturated reality before he breathes the Holy Spirit out onto his disciples, creating them anew.

The focus on this new age is immediately apparent - *Jesus defines the primary characteristic of this age to be the giving and receiving of forgiveness.* Because of the salvation, the divine forgiveness, made possible through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, forgiveness is now made possible. Breathing the Holy Spirit upon them, Jesus gives them the gift that gives them the power to offer the same gift to others.

I have heard that some members of the congregation feel I am yelling at them in my sermons. I suspect that this means there are some people who hear me say that they should do this or that, and the exhortation to do this or that sounds like a demand delivered judgmentally. I am sorry if anyone hears me this way, for this is not my intention. It *is* my intention to say that once we come to salvation in Christ, we are (from that point on) part of God's action team, charged with bringing God's message of forgiveness to everyone who doesn't know Jesus. But the piece that always needs to be associated with the charge to be a Jesus-representative, is that the charge to go and share is combined with the power of the Holy Spirit given to us.

My concern in my preaching over the past eighteen months or so is that Jesus intended us to be Spirit-empowered in all of our ministries. We have been given spiritual gifts - supernaturally supercharged abilities - which I believe we (as a church) are under-utilizing. So, when we try to do what Jesus charges us to do, we feel inadequate and under-prepared. No promise of ease was offered when Jesus breathed upon the disciples and told them to "Receive the Holy Spirit." There is no suggestion in the Scripture that following Jesus means carefree living. Running for Jesus may not be comfortable, and sweating for Jesus may not be fashionable. So, again, how do we get the staying power to keep at the race, and even finish?

We have been forgiven. We are a forgiven people. This free unmerited favor, this grace (1st), and the power of the Holy Spirit (2nd), are intended to ease our burden along the road. By grace, even sweaty people, running around like fools, become pillars of faith. By grace, God calls us by name. By grace, God appears to us in moments of deepest gloom and skepticism. By grace, we have access to the power of the Spirit to share with others what has been shared with us, namely, that we have been forgiven by the One who rose from the dead.

If we have any problem, it's that many of us are trying to be a six-cylinder car with only three cylinders working. I urge you to search the Scriptures to see if I am not right. After accepting the forgiveness of God, the first decision is to follow Jesus. What turned the sweaty, frightened band of disciples into the early church that changed the world? What gave them the confidence to go on? I submit that it was the power of the Holy Spirit, the dunamis-power that turned timid followers into preaching powerhouses, fearful associates into men and women who healed the sick, cast out demons, and brought wholeness to a broken people. If the first decision is to follow Jesus, the second decision is to become empowered by the Holy Spirit. Without the latter, we will be out of breath halfway through the race.

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